

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RABAT 01190 071603Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 TRSE-00 /081 W
-----072241Z 057665 /62

R 071518Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1172
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL TANGIER
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 1190

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT MO
SUBJECT: STATUS OF MOROCCAN ELECTIONS

REF: RABAT 0919

1. SUMMARY: KING'S APPOINTMENT OF FOUR POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS
TO CABINET EASES ATMOSPHERE. ISTIQLAL AND USFP CONTINUE TO
PRESS FOR FURTHER GUARANTEES ON CONDUCT OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.
DATE OF ELECTIONS NOT YET ANNOUNCED. APRIL 1 HAD TENTATIVELY BEEN
PROJECTED BUT PARTY LEADERS NOW LOOK TO SECOND HALF OF MAY, WITH
PARLIAMENT SEATED IN JUNE. IAMGE OF IMPROVED NATIONAL UNITY
SHOULD HELP KING IN DEALING WITH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN PROBLEMS.
END SUMMARY.

2. KING NAMES OPPOSITION LEADERS TO CABINET. KING ON MARCH 1
NAMED LEADERS OF FOUR PRINCIPAL POLITICAL PARTIES AS MINISTERS
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PAGE 02 RABAT 01190 071603Z

OF STATE WITHOUT PORTFOLIO: MOHAMED BOUCETTA - ISTIQLAL;
ABDERRAHIM BOUABID - SOCIALIST UNION OF POPULAR FORCES (USFP);
MAHJOUBI AHERDAN - POPULAR MOVEMENT (MP); AND DR. ABDELKARIM
KHATIB - CONSTITUTIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC POPULAR MOVEMENT (MPCD).
OMITTED WERE ALI YATA - PARTY OF PROGRESS AND SOCIALISM
(COMMUNIST) - AND LEADERS OF THE THREE SMALLER PRO-PALACE PARTIES,
MEMBERS SINCE LAST OCTOBER OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL TO SUPERVISE

ELECTIONS (76 RABAT 5366) BUT WHOSE PARTIES HAD SHOWN LITTLE STRENGTH AT THE POLLS. IN ANNOUNCING THE APPOINTMENTS, KING WARMLY PRAISED THE NEW MINISTERS FOR THEIR EXPERIENCE AND NATIONALIST ACTIVITIES. IN ADDITION TO THEIR HELP IN SUPERVISING ELECTIONS, KING SAID HE WOULD COUNT ON THEIR PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT DELIBERATIONS AND IN PREPARING "STATE OPTIONS".

3. PARTY VIEWS. ISTIQLAL LEADER BOUCETTA TOLD AFP MARCH 2 THAT THE ROYAL DECISION GAVE HOPE THAT DEMOCRATIZATION WOULD CONTINUE. KING, "FACED WITH DETERIORATION OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION", HAD UNDERSTOOD SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE. BOUCETTA INDICATED THAT PRIME MINISTER OSMAN HAD GIVEN "FIRM ASSURANCES" ON PARTY DEMANDS THAT PRESS CENSORSHIP BE LIFTED, ELECTORAL LISTS REVISED, AND NEW VOTER CARDS ISSUED. BOTH USFP AND ISTIQLAL HAVE STRESSED THAT THEIR PARTICIPATION IN CABINET IS LIMITED TO PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS, AND HAVE ALSO PLAYED UP NEED FOR IMPROVED ELECTORAL GUARANTEES, INCLUDING, IN ADDITION TO THOSE MENTIONED BY BOUCETTA, TRANSFER OF FULL POWERS TO LOCAL COUNCILS ELECTED IN NOVEMBER AND REVISION OF ELECTORAL LAW WITH RESHAPING OF VOTING DISTRICTS WHICH PRESENTLY WEIGHTED HEAVILY IN FAVOR OF RURAL AREAS. USFP HAS ALSO REQUESTED RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. BOTH PARTIES, NO DOUBT AS A MEANS OF MAINTAINING BARGAINING LEVERAGE, HAVE HELD IN ABEYANCE FORMAL DECISIONS ON PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS.

4. KING REAFFIRMS ELECTORAL PLANS. IN MARCH 3 THRONE DAY SPEECH (RABAT 1160), KING GAVE STRONG PUBLIC REAFFIRMATION OF INTENTION TO ESTABLISH THE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS STIPULATED BY 1972 CONSTITUTION. KING REFRAINED, HOWEVER, FROM DISCUSSING CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 RABAT 01190 071603Z

TIMING OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, ANY REFORMS WHICH MIGHT BE UNDER CONSIDERATION, OR ROLE OF OPPOSITION IN CABINET.

5. ON LATTER ISSUE, USFP LEADER BOUABID CONFIDED TO US ON FEBRUARY 25 THAT THE KING PREFERRED TO ADD POLITICAL LEADERS TO THE CABINET INSTEAD OF RELEASING NUMEROUS MINISTERS WHO WOULD BE RUNNING FOR PARLIAMENT. AS FOR POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS, BOUABID SAID HE HAD TAKEN INITIATIVE WITH KING BECAUSE THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH TIME BEFORE PREVIOUSLY PROJECTED APRIL 1 DATE TO CARRY OUT ELECTORAL REFORMS.

6. ALL FOUR NEW MINISTERS INDICATED TO AMBASSADOR DURING THRONE DAY CELEBRATIONS IN MARRAKECH ON MARCH 3 THAT ELECTIONS WOULD IN ALL PROBABILITY TAKE PLACE IN THE SECOND HALF OF MAY, THAT A BRIEF EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENT WOULD BE HELD IN JUNE FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF SEATING THE NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS, AND THAT ALSO IN JUNE A NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD BE NAMED INVOLVING CONSIDERABLE CHANGES. MPCD LEADER KHATIB DOUBTED VERY MUCH THAT HE OR HIS THREE NEWLY NAMED POLITICAL COLLEAGUES WOULD BE PART OF

THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

7. COMMENT: KING HAS THUS SUCCEEDED IN ALLEVIATING PREVIOUSLY RISING TENSIONS WITH THE OPPOSITION OVER ALLEGED IRREGULARITIES IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS (REFTEL). WITH THE OPPOSITION REPRESENTED IN THE GOVERNMENT, CHANCES OF BOYCOTT OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS APPEAR SLIGHT. AT SAME TIME, KING HAS REFURBISHED A DETERIORATING IMAGE OF NATIONAL UNITY, WHILE KEEPING INTACT HIS FOUR-YEAR-OLD CABINET. THE OPPOSITION WILL NO DOUBT CONTINUE TO TRY TO AVOID ASSOCIATION WITH OVERALL GOVERNMENT DECISIONS, PARTICULARLY ON DOMESTIC ISSUES. NEVERTHELESS, A MORE UNIFIED INTERNAL FRONT SHOULD HELP HASSAN IN DEALING WITH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRAINS, AS WELL AS WITH EXTERNAL DIFFICULTIES EXEMPLIFIED BY MOROCCO'S RECENT TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL FROM OAU (RABAT 1050).
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